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O U R G O S P E L.

BY

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AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

BOSTON.

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“The object of the American Unitarian Association shall be to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure Christianity ; and all Unitarian Christians shall be invited to unite and co-operate with it for that purpose.” — ARTICLE I. *of the By-Laws of the American Unitarian Association.*

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OUR GOSPEL.

The glorious gospel of the blessed God. — 1 TIM. i. 11.

Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. — LUKE ii. 10.

A CERTAIN section of the Christian Church has for a long period of years assumed to itself the name "evangelical," — "the bearer of good tidings." These churches have claimed to be in some special sense the keepers of the good news of God. They have their "gospel" services, they publish "gospel hymns," they hold "gospel" meetings of every kind.

Another section has tacitly admitted, or has at least allowed the impression to go abroad, that it is not evangelical, that it does not represent and proclaim to the people the good news of God, that it has only the philosophy and the wisdom of men.

Yet these churches that claim to be, in some peculiar sense, the bringers of the good news of God, do not now place and have not been accustomed to place that which was the peculiar first great message of Jesus in the forefront of their proclamation: "The kingdom of God is at hand," "The kingdom of God is among you." They have placed this kingdom in the next world, where Jesus did not place it. They have built around it a wall which Jesus did not build, and they have set at its gates keepers whom Jesus did not appoint. They have

given them passwords, shibboleths, terms of admission of which Jesus has never spoken. For there is only one place in all the gospel story where Jesus, of set purpose, deliberately declares who it is that shall enter into and become partakers of the divine kingdom, — when he formally separates between the sheep and the goats, when he assigns to the right hand those who are to inherit the kingdom of the Father. And it is most noteworthy that not a single one of these conditions to which I have alluded does he anywhere speak of. He says nothing about the necessity of accepting a certain scheme of belief. It was not a question as to whether they held certain opinions about God or about himself or about the origin and nature of man. The one only condition which he there establishes, — and we should suppose that he would have felt it incumbent upon himself to set forth the true conditions there, if anywhere, — the one only condition to which he refers is the simple one of character and of human service.

I do not propose to-night to antagonize the beliefs of others any more than is absolutely necessary. I would that I might avoid one single reference which could in any way be construed into antagonism. I shall speak as briefly as may be, by way of definition, for the sake of clearness, and that we may realize our position, and understand the glorious gospel of the blessed God that is committed to our care. For it seems to me that we have so long been accustomed to think of ourselves as critics, as seekers after truth, rather than those that possess it, as only trying to find our way, rather than those who are on the road and should lead the way, that we do not half understand how magnificent is the message which is committed to our keeping, and for the deliverance of which to the modern world we ought to hold ourselves responsible.

I shall, then, discuss for a little a few of the great essentials of the creeds, as they have been held in the Christian churches of the past. My purpose will not be to discuss whether they are true or false, and I wish you to bear that point in mind. That is too large a theme to enter upon in a popular discourse like this. I propose to ask, rather, whether these great beliefs, as they have been held and are held and proclaimed to-day by the so-called evangelical churches, even if true, are entitled to the name of "gospel," — "good news;" whether the claim is valid that these old churches do peculiarly represent the gospel of Jesus, or whether it is to us, perhaps unknowing, that has been committed this precious charge.

Let me pause long enough for one preliminary word. If there are any here to-night who sincerely and devoutly cling still to the old faith, I beg they will give me credit for the same sincerity which I freely concede to them; and I beg that they will not think I am animated by any spirit of denominational discourtesy, but that I simply seek with all my soul, as I trust do they, to find, to stand for, and proclaim the truth of God.

Let us, then, note, first, the old doctrine of revelation. It is conceded on all hands, I suppose, if God exist, and if he loves his children, that he would not leave us without sufficient light and guidance to enable us to find the pathway in which he would have us tread. We might, then, naturally expect a revelation to be given to the world at some time and in some form. What is the claim in regard to this revelation as set forth in the old creed? I will try briefly to declare it.

During a period of four thousand years, according to the traditional estimate, God, by means of angelic messengers, through prophets, through inspired writers, delivered portions of his truth to a little people in-

habiting a country about as large as the State of Massachusetts. The rest of the world was left to wander and stumble in darkness, finding its way as it might, according to the utterly inadequate light of natural reason, this natural reason perverted so that it had no power to discern the truth of God. At the end of this four thousand years a wider, newer revelation is given. Christianity becomes the dominant power of the so-called civilized world. Yet, after Christianity has been in existence for nearly two thousand years, this revelation is made known to hardly more than one-third of the inhabitants of the earth. The rest still wander and stumble in darkness. Then this revelation has been couched in such terms and delivered in such a way that thousands and thousands of the best scholars and the noblest men of the modern world do not see their way to accepting it as a divine revelation. Beginning in barbarism, with barbaric conceptions of God and men, the Bible rises as civilization rises, ever growing up toward a fairer and a nobler ideal. So these critics to whom I have referred are compelled to feel that the revelation bears everywhere the marks of human origin, human limitations and defects.

Then we must remember that, according to the revelation that has been made to the modern world, the human race was in existence at least a hundred thousand — probably two hundred thousand — years before the dream of Adam or of Eden ever entered the human mind. Here, then, are all these countless prehistoric millions on millions of men and women who never had even one single ray of divine revelation vouchsafed to them. I submit to you, men and women accustomed to think and to feel and to aspire, that, if this be true, it is not good news. It cannot, in any proper use of human language, be proclaimed as a gospel. It is not what we should

expect to be the method of the loving and impartial Father who cares equally for all his children. The popular doctrine, then, as to revelation is not good news. Even if true, it is not entitled to be called a gospel.

Let us turn now to consider the character of God as set forth in the old creeds. I can only touch upon this briefly.

God, we are told, is infinite, a Being of all power, all wisdom, and all love; and yet this Being, who is all power and able to save all men, has vouchsafed his light and the message of his salvation to only the smallest part of his creatures. We are told that he is good; and yet for thousands of years he has been proclaimed as the embodiment of the principle that "might makes right." Paul, for example, says: "Who art thou that repliest against God? Has not the potter power over his clay to make one vessel to honor and another to dishonor?" Yes, we freely concede that the potter has power over his clay, because it is clay, and because it cannot possibly concern the clay whether it be made into one kind of vessel or another. But, if the vessels could feel, if they were capable of infinite pain, would the potter then have power over his clay to do with it merely as he pleased? Can we accept, then, this conception of God as a Being of infinite love, one who does what he will with his creatures, choosing one here and another there to be saved as monuments of his infinite mercy, and passing by the great majority of mankind in all ages, leaving them so to suffer eternal pain as monuments of his so-called justice and his wrath? We submit that the infinite God, who has created the universe and all the creatures that live and breathe, is under a responsibility at least equal to his power, — a responsibility to his own character of justice and of love. And we submit that even Infinite Power has no right to do that which is wrong.

If God, then, be the one who has been pictured in the creeds, who makes human souls for happiness or torture merely as it pleases him, then we are compelled to say that, measured by any human standard of right or wrong, he is not Infinite Goodness, though he may be Infinite Power.

You remember that dreary, fearful poem of Tennyson's called "Despair," in which he refers to this conception of God:—

"I should call on that Infinite Love that has served us so well?
 Infinite Cruelty, rather, that made everlasting hell,—
 Made us, foreknew us, foredoomed us, and does what he will with his
 own!
 Better our dead, brute mother, who never has heard us groan!"

This is the way the tender-hearted, magnificent poet expresses his indignation against that conception of an Infinite Power who rules the world according to his own whim and caprice. Read the poem for its terrible indictment of the old-time creed.

If there be this kind of God in the universe, we will bow our heads perforce, because we must; but we will not stultify our own sense of that which is tender and human and true and loving by calling him good. And, if I believed that there were such a God, I would not bend in worship at the foot of his throne. I would rather stand erect and bear the lightning of his wrath. If there be such a God, the proclamation of the fact certainly is not good news. It would be the saddest news that was ever brought to this poor, sin-stricken, discouraged, troubled, yet so far hopeful world.

Let me turn and consider the doctrine of man as held by the old creeds, — man created perfect six thousand years ago, so perfect that old Dr. South, in the time of Charles II., declared Socrates and Plato to be only

broken remnants of an Adam. Yet at the first temptation he fell! This might not be so strange or so contradictory of the grace of God; but this first man was so constituted that in him all the unborn millions of the world fell, too. When children come into the world, in their helplessness and sweet infancy, they are under the anger of the Infinite One. They are born in such a way that they have no power to discern the right or to choose it when discerned. They must wait helpless until moved upon by the Infinite Pity, if so be that the Infinite Pity is for them. And so these countless millions of men, drifting, floating upon the tide of being, are hurried by the relentless years until they plunge moment by moment over the Niagara of Death, into the seething waters of torment below.

When I was a boy and attended the monthly missionary concerts, I used to be told — and that was the great motive for doing all that we could for missions — that the heathen by the thousand every moment, at every tick of the clock, were being plunged over into the abyss of everlasting woe. Is this the kind of humanity which the loving, wise Father has created? If so, we will accept it. We will bend our heads to the inevitable fact; but we will not contradict truth and goodness by proclaiming this message as a gospel of good news to the world. It is most assuredly not glad tidings of great joy to be proclaimed to all people.

Next we will consider the doctrine of the incarnation as bearing on this condition of things. I shall not deal with the subject of the character of Jesus so much as with the dogma of the incarnation as a part of the scheme of salvation, and note the logical outcome of it. For four thousand years God was presumably doing all that he could to save mankind. He sent prophets, angels, messengers: he inspired men to write and record

his will. And, as the result, at the end of four thousand years there was one small people a part of whom were trying to be obedient. But the majority, even of them, were still astray concerning the truth of God and their relations to him. They were obdurate, stiff-necked, disobedient. At the end of this time God himself comes down to the earth. He takes upon himself our human form, becomes a man, suffers, teaches, lives for thirty years, and dies an ignominious death. Then he ascends on high to sit on the throne of the universe. He organizes his Church, and sends out his infinite Spirit to inform and inspire this Church, and lead it in its missionary operations for the salvation of the world. And, presumably, for the last nineteen hundred years he has been doing all that he can do to save mankind; and yet to-day what is the result? The outcome of this stupendous miracle of revelation and incarnation is that hardly one-third of the world has ever heard of him. The majority of that third does not believe. Thousands do not care; and even in the churches themselves they tell us that there are large numbers of those who profess to accept this scheme who are not hopefully saved. I submit to you that, if this be true, it is the most stupendous and lamentable failure in the history of mankind. It is certainly not a gospel to be proclaimed as the good news of the blessed God.

A word now upon human destiny. This has been implied all along in what I have already said. The destiny of the great majority of the human race, after everything that God has devised and has been trying to do for it, is something so terrible as to be utterly inconceivable by the imagination of man. Not only we who dare to hold what we believe to be a brighter, more cheery faith, but those who have held the old ideas, have been pressed upon by the difficulties of it until they

have bowed their heads and been unable to speak. Dr. Albert Barnes of Philadelphia, in his time one of the ablest leaders of the Presbyterian Church, has left his thoughts in this respect on record. He says, substantially: "Friends tell me that they have been able to find light on this problem. I have listened to their explanations, and have tried to understand them; but, when I look over the world and see millions on millions of men utterly careless, indifferent, and going down to everlasting death, and when I remember that only God can save them and he does not, I am struck dumb." Then he adds these words: "It is all dark, dark, dark, to my soul; and I cannot disguise it." Albert Barnes, then, were he here, would join with me in saying that, even though he felt compelled to accept it as true, he could not proclaim it as good news, as part of the good tidings of the blessed God.

I am aware that there are large numbers of men in all the churches who will say that they do not believe this doctrine; that they do not hold any longer these horrible conceptions of God and man and destiny. I am aware that there are exceptional men, occupying exceptional positions, who proclaim to their intimate friends their rejection of these ideas. But so long as they are published broadcast over the civilized world in all the great creeds of the great churches; so long as the Episcopal Church, for example, through its House of Bishops, has declared to all its communicants that "fixity of interpretation is of the essence of the creeds," and that they are to hold in all their old meaning unchanged forever; so long as no young man proposing to enter the ministry would be deemed fitted for a pulpit while rejecting any of these doctrines; so long as the American Board, which is the missionary organization of the freest of all the orthodox churches, refuses to send a

missionary to the heathen because he dares to hope — he does not express it as a positive belief — that the heathen who have never heard of Christ in this world may possibly have an opportunity in the next; so long as all these doctrines are in the basis on which is organized the so-called Evangelical Alliance, — so long we have a right to say these are the general beliefs of the old churches. If they are, then certainly the old churches not only have no monopoly of the gospel of Jesus, but I submit that they do not preach his gospel at all. That which they preach, misnamed the gospel, is made up of bad science, of false philosophy, of tradition, of barbaric conceptions, of superstitions, — a scheme *about* Jesus instead of the gospel *of* Jesus. It seems to me that it is time for us to elaim and to make proclamation to the world that we preach the gospel of the blessed God, that we proclaim to the world the good news of the Father.

I ask you now to turn to the more grateful contemplation of some of the positive aspects of our glorious gospel.

What is our doctrine of revelation? We do not reject the blessed insights, truths, and revealings contained in this magnificent book called the Bible: only we hold that “the word of God is not bound” in covers, not bound in any book exclusively. We hold to the truth that has come through the lips of Confucius. We believe that a part of the divine revelation was vouchsafed to Sakya-Muni; that Zoroaster gave some part of the message of the Infinite to his people in Persia; that from the beginning of the world God has been revealing himself to his children who have been listening and catching some sentences of his blessed truth. We believe that in every nation, under every sky, in every age of the world, God’s revelation has come as fast and as far as

men have been able to receive it. We believe that there never has been more than one religion in the world, in the profoundest sense of that term. All men everywhere have been "feeling after God, if haply they might find him who is not far from every one of us." We do not believe that God has left any of his children to wander and stumble in darkness. All truth that has ever come to the world is, as far as it goes, a revelation of the divine. When the astronomer studies the heavens to find out the true system of the stars, he is entitled to say, with Kepler, "O God, I think over again thy thoughts after thee!" When history is accurately written, it is an unfolding of the method of God in his dealing with the origin, the growth, the decay, or the prosperity of nations. When we are studying the development of the moral nature, the growth of conscience, we are reading the revelation of God's law of righteousness written on the hearts and recorded in the lives of his children. When we catch glimpses, intimations, ideals, of those things that are finer and better than have ever yet been incarnated in the life of the race, we are anticipating that which is to be written on those new leaves of God's book, to be clearly read when they shall be turned, in his ever progressive, always advancing, and never completed Bible.

All truth is from God, as all light is from the sun. Gas-light, electric-light, the light of the wood fire or of the coal in your grate, the gleam of the diamond,—all is sunlight, no matter through what medium it may come or in what country it may be seen. So all truth is God's truth, whether it come by the lips of a speaker in China or in the islands of the sea, whether it be called pagan or Christian. All truth that bears on the culture of the human soul, the development of human life, is part of the unfolding revelation of the divine. So we believe

that God has never left any of his children without some rays of light, and the truth of God anywhere is the word of God. It is infallible, in so far as it is demonstrated to be true.

Is not this entitled to be called good news? We do not believe that God has pets and favorites, that the heavenly Father has vouchsafed only to us some rays of guidance, but that all men everywhere, from the far-off beginning until to-day, have been equally favored according to their ability to accept God's truth. God comes as fast as the world is able to receive him. He always stands at the door and knocks, not only here, but in India, in China, and all over the world. He comes to the mind as truth, into the heart as love, and into the character as righteousness. Millions of those whom we carelessly call pagan have reverently read some divine message written by the finger of God, and have been able to open wide the doors of their nature for the coming in of the divine.

What is our doctrine of God? We believe that he is not only Infinite Power, but Infinite Love; that he loves every child that he has created, and that he holds them close to his own infinite heart. We do not believe that there ever has been any gulf between God and his children that needed to be supernaturally bridged. We believe that he is nearer to us than our pulse-beat, nearer than the thoughts we think, nearer than the most secret feelings of our hearts. God is all power not only, but all love. As we look down the ages, hundreds of thousands of years, and see the first man beginning to lift his eyes toward heaven, we believe that God is by his side leading and helping him there. When he stumbles in his life or stammers in his speech, God holds him to his heart, and guards him as his child with unspeakable tenderness and care. Is it not good news to the word to

believe that God is the Father of every child that has ever been created, has never for a moment forgotten his love, but that he is ever leading and lifting every one in his struggle toward the higher and the better life?

Let us note next our doctrine concerning the nature and origin of man. We do not start with a perfect man in the Garden of Eden six thousand years ago. We do not go up the pathway of history, which implies that the progress of man has been a descent. We go back and down the ages; and the Garden of Eden that we discover is a jungle, and the man Adam, the first of his race, instead of being a perfect and magnificent creature, we see close on the borders of the animal world. We discern him hardly distinguishable from the animal, having just climbed upon his new-found feet, having newly discovered his hands, having just turned his meaningless cry into a voice, just beginning to look about and above him with that infinite question in his eyes which has been the root, the mainspring, the motive force, of all human advance from that day to this. We discover no fall. We believe it to be scientifically settled — that is, established by the scientific revelation of God's truth — that there never has been any fall of man. Rather do we place, as the corner-stone of the theology of the future, the ascent of man! From that far-off age, ignorant, animal, climbing by a pathway watered by tears, stained by blood, stumbling, falling, rising again, making endless mistakes, but striving with infinite patience to correct those mistakes, — we believe, I say, in man's ascent up the ages. In those far-off, prehistoric times, man, as the result of self-sacrifice as noble as our own, laid the foundations of the world as it exists to-day. These men climbed on and up until we see such heights as those represented by the names of Homer, of Socrates, of Aristotle, of Plato,

of Virgil, of Dante, of Goethe, of Shakespeare, such heights of spiritual attainment as Confucius, as Zoroaster, as Sakya-Muni, and, above them all, the magnificent figure of the meek and lowly Jesus, in whose presence we bow, Son of God and supreme product of humanity.

Man, then, has climbed until he has shown us such names, such characters, such achievements, such manifestations of all that is high in human nature, so that we are able to exclaim, "Now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be!" For we believe that, as we go on to gain higher and finer and fairer and grander visions of the divine, this poor human race of ours is to be transformed and glorified. Man, then, has been progressively climbing up out of the animal into heart, into brain, into conscience, into soul. In thousands and thousands of cases in every land there have been men who have stood masters of themselves, masters of their conditions, looking lovingly in the face of the sweet heavens, conscious that they were children of the Highest.

This is our doctrine of the origin, nature, and progress of man. Is not this entitled to be called good news, — the gospel of the blessed God? Is it not full of inspiration? Is there not that in it which should kindle our enthusiasm? Should we not be fired by a message like this, not content until we have proclaimed it in every nation, every city, every hamlet, every home in all the world?

And what is our doctrine concerning Jesus and the incarnation? I say to you frankly that I speak for myself, but I think I speak for Unitarianism as well, when I say that we believe Jesus was man, born as we are; that he died as we die, — a man. I do not say a "mere man;" for I am not able to measure the depth, the height, the magnificence of even "mere" manhood.

I do not say a man "like us;" for Shakespeare was not a man like us, Dante was not a man like us, Socrates was not a man like us. He was at least differentiated from each of us of this generation by the magnificence of his genius, by the greatness of his natural endowments, by the power which he was able to wield over his time and over the world. I believe that Jesus was a man, and this is not to degrade Jesus: it is to lift humanity. They who tell us that they cannot comprehend Jesus unless they think of him as something more than human generally begin their argument by assuming a very low type of humanity, and then no wonder they are not able to include Jesus under that category. Rather do we look upon Jesus and see in him that which is possible in us all. As I read in the opening of the gospel the story of the birth, the childhood, and the life of Jesus, I cannot reconcile this reading with anything else than the humanity of the Nazarene. If his brothers knew that he was God, supernaturally born, how is it possible that they should not have believed on him? If his mother knew that she held in her arms the Almighty God of the universe, could she have wondered as he developed a precocious boyhood and an unusual knowledge? Could she have been timid about leaving him alone over night with his friends on the visit to the temple when he was twelve years of age? I cannot read the records, and believe that Mary herself understood anything other than that he was a lovable and wonderful child, as so many mothers have felt since.

Then, as I study the records of his heroism and of his death, I love to believe that he who expired on the cross that Friday afternoon was a man. If he was the Almighty God of the universe, would he have shrunk at facing that for the express purpose of accomplishing which he came into the world? It seems to me that

that scene on the cross is theatrical, if he was God. But if he was man, — if a man hangs there, and with his last breath prays for the forgiveness of his murderers; if a man hangs there, and, as he swoons in that last dreadful hour, there sweeps over him the chilling breath of a doubt as to his own mission, so that he exclaims in his weakness and agony, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” if, even then, with his hand growing numb in death, he still clings to the hand of the infinite Father in a faith that is mightier than death, dying thus for his faith, dying thus because he will be faithful to his message, dying thus that he may draw all other faithful souls after him to himself, — then can I bow in awe, in love, in reverence, glad that there is a son of God, my brother, a man like this, who, indeed, can be my elder brother, my friend, my inspirer in all coming time!

We believe, then, not in an incarnation that confines itself to one historic character. I believe, rather, that God is progressively incarnating himself in the human race; that in the very first man that ever lifted his eyes to heaven God was present, working through, informing, and lifting him. So, in all that is beautiful, all that is true, all that is tender, all that is high and fine in the human race, from that day to this, has been so much of the presence and gracious power of God.

As the years go by, God is more and more to become incarnate in the human race. The significant and central thought, to my mind, in the character and life of Jesus is his consciousness of oneness with the Father, — the same kind of oneness which he tells us he expects us to develop. As he is one with the Father, he wishes us to be one with the Father and with him. If he be not man, if being divine be different from the divinest humanity, then he cannot be my exemplar, and I cannot

attempt to copy him. Dr. Lyman Abbott of Plymouth Church, the editor of the "Outlook," said, in an article in the "Forum" three or four years ago, that he did not believe there was any difference in kind between God and Jesus and man. He believed that man was God minus infinity, and God was man plus infinity. Our conception of Jesus is that he is divine as man may be divine. Did you ever stop to think of it? If the Almighty God were determined to put all possible of the divine into the life of a single man, he could put in no more than the man could hold. That is, he could not possibly be anything more than a perfect man. Perfect man is that which Jesus has pointed out as the ideal for all of us to seek to attain. "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect."

And now I come to speak of one more point, — our gospel as to the destiny of the race. I do not believe that death came into this world as the result of the invasion of evil from without. I do not believe that death is the result of human sin or a token of divine anger. I believe that it is as natural as birth, that it is a part of the universal and eternal order of God. I believe that all men, as they pass through this experience which we call death, are five minutes after that experience precisely what they were five minutes before. I do not believe that there is anything in this experience that determines destiny or limits probation. Everywhere men are under the universal law of cause and effect, and under that law are creating their own characters, their own heavens, their own hells.

What is our doctrine of salvation? We do not believe that the acceptance of any formal creed necessarily changes character. We do not believe that the partaking of any sacrament necessarily changes character. We do not believe that placing water or oil on the forehead

necessarily changes the soul within. We believe not even that character is the condition of salvation. We go deeper than that, and assert that character is salvation, in this world or any other world; that there is no salvation beyond the limits of character. We have learned enough to consider as utterly shallow and antiquated the old idea that place determines hell or heaven. I used to imagine when I was a boy, and I used to dream over it as a part of that dreadful closing scene that filled my imagination, that, if I could only get through the gate before it was closed for the last time, I should be in heaven as really as Peter or John or any of the saints who were haloed with the glory of the past. But we know enough of this world and of human character to-day to take a deeper view than that. There are men and women whose houses are the receptacle of everything that money can buy, filled with art, with books, with musical instruments. They have at their disposal servants to come and go at their will, and yet they may be burdened with life-long sorrow and pain. And there are men living in rude hovels, in cabins, scattered over the land, with little money, living from hand to mouth, without books or music or pictures, lacking almost everything which men in civilized lands are supposed to care for, who have a song of joy and peace in their souls. We know, then, that salvation does not depend on where we are: it depends upon what we are. General Grant used to say, during the last years of his life, that he had learned to recognize two tunes. He knew "Old Hundred," and he had heard "Hail to the Chief" played so often at his approach that he came to recognize that. Would the way to make General Grant happy have been to take him to a symphony concert? Would you take a blind man to the top of a hill overlooking a river, and including a wide range of landscape, that he

might enjoy the view? Would you take a man with no taste for books or reading to a library, and expect him to find it Paradise? We know, then, that, if men are to be happy, there must be adjustment between their tastes, their feelings, their desires, and their surroundings. Their happiness resides only in this adjustment. If a man is perfectly attuned physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually to the universe, then the universe, with its million fingers, plays upon him; and the result is the music of happiness. If, then, you wish to be happy in the spiritual world, is there any other way than by cultivating the spiritual faculties, the spiritual tastes and feelings, so that you may be at home there? We cannot escape ourselves in this or in any other world. We have come at last to recognize the profound truth of those two lines from Omar Khayyám, —

“Heaven but the vision of fulfilled desire,
And hell the shadow of a soul on fire.”

James Russell Lowell has put the secret in three lines, —

“Thou seest no beauty save thou make it first:
Man, woman, nature, each is but a glass
Where the soul sees the image of herself.”

Let us remember, then, that in this world the result of every thought, every feeling, every wish, every purpose, every action, inevitably treads upon the heels of every thought, feeling, purpose, action; that day by day and hour by hour we are creating character under the changeless laws of God, — the laws of cause and effect. Let us also remember that neither in this world nor in any other shall we ever be able to get into any more of heaven than we first get into ourselves. We do not preach universal salvation in the sense that universal and perfect happiness comes the moment after death.

We teach that in this world and in any other world men reap what they sow, that they cannot escape the results of transgressing the laws of God, that they find peace only as they discover and obey the eternal laws of the Divine.

Do you remember the old Eastern apologue that puts this truth with such force and vividness? A soul, recently freed from the body, is treading the unaccustomed pathways of the other world; and he hears behind footsteps as of one that pursues. He turns and sees a hideous shape upon his track, and, trembling with fear, cries out, "What art thou?" And the answer comes, "I am thine own actions: night and day I follow thee."

Here, then, are hints of our doctrine concerning salvation, concerning the destiny of man. Only, we believe that, as God has almighty power and is almighty wisdom and almighty love, that somewhen and somewhere he will bring all souls unto himself. We believe that he will scourge his children, if need be, until they are whipped out of their sins, out of their wrong, and brought to recognize the inevitable and eternal conditions of good.

Is it not the good news of the blessed God that all men everywhere are his children, that he folds them all within his arms, that he follows them with pain in which is love, if they go astray, that he follows them with peace and happiness, if they find and obey his laws, but that no one can finally escape him? Each man may say in the words of Whittier:—

"No harm from Him can come to me
On ocean or on shore.

"I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care."

Here, then, are hints of the glorious gospel of the blessed God committed to our care. We, then, are entitled to say, to cry aloud: Good news! God has never left any of his children without a ray of guidance! Good news! There is no gulf between God and his children that needs to be supernaturally bridged! Good news! The world is not lost: God is forever guiding it and holding it, whether it is conscious of that guidance or not! Good news! Sin is only a means by which we climb into higher knowledge and development of soul and character! Good news! Pain and anguish and death are not our enemies or the enemies of God, but only ministers by which he trains and leads us into something better and higher than we have yet been able to attain! Good news! God is love, God is life, God is wisdom! God is caring for the world, and forever lifting it to himself! Good news!

“God’s in his heaven,
All’s well with the world!”

O friends and fellow-religionists, if we may rationally believe in a doctrine of revelation, of God, of man, of Jesus, of destiny, so universal, so magnificent as this, ought we not to feel the finger of God touching each of us upon the forehead as with a chrism of divine consecration? Let us then pledge ourselves to God and to each other, so long as men are wandering in darkness, wandering in fear, misconceiving God, misconceiving themselves, and so falling and dying on every hand, that there shall come to us no rest until we have proclaimed this gospel of the blessed God in every home from the North to the South, from the East to the West, in all our land!

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